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SILVERTON

JACK BENHAM



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SILVERTON

AND NEIGHBORING GHOST TOWNS

HOWARDSVILLE
EUREKA
NIEGOLDSTOWN
MIDDLETON
ANIMAS FORKS

MINERAL POINT
GLADSTONE
CHATTANOOGA
POUGHKEEPSIE
CONGRESS

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THE AUTHOR

The fabulous cache of intriguing tales about Colorful Colorado's history, from the days of the first trappers or gold and silver prospectors right up to today's exciting developments, has hardly been tapped in spite of years of research and writing. This fresh new look at Silverton, "The Town That Wouldn't Quit" will bring into focus a kaleidoscope of events that made the town famous worldwide. Today it continues to be a mecca, attracting thousands of tourists every year on the last genuine narrow gauge train still running, just as it was when the history told here was being lived.

Like passengers on the "ride to yesterday" you are about to follow those early explorers as you enjoy the results of thousands of hours of intense research and organizing of photographs and intimate details about Silverton beginning with the arrival of the first Spanish explorers over 200 years ago.

Jack Benham's efforts are a real labor of love resulting from his years of close association with the area while working as a consulting mining geologist out in the field instead of from behind a desk. He fell in love with the San Juan Mountains about the time he enrolled at old Fort Lewis College then located at Hesperus. His interest and enthusiasm resulted in a popular book on the early days of Ouray where he and his wife, Sarah, have a home and Indian Arts shop named after the famous Bear Creek where the early "Pioneer of the San Juans; — Otto Mears", had a toll bridge before his railroad building days.

Those who lived the history he writes about should rest easy in the knowledge that their story has been well told and preserved in this book by an author who knows and loves his mountains as they did. 'All that glitters is not gold' — it can be a book like this.

L. W. "Larry" Pleasant
Former Editor, Dolores Star

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Silverton News Agency 6/17/2000



Silverton, Colorado as seen in sketch from Frank Leslie Illustrated Newspaper, May 8, 1875. The rugged peaks seen in the background cap Sultan Mountain. The Greene Co. Smelting works north of town are depicted in the foreground.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The photographs were obtained from the State Historical Society of Colorado Library and the Western History Department of the Denver Public Library. For research assistance, I wish to thank Dr. Maxine Benson, Curator of Documentary Resources, State Historical Society of Colorado; Mrs. Kay Wilcox, Research Librarian and Mrs. Eleanor Gehres, Head, Western History Department, Denver Public Library; and Mrs. Stanna Meyers, Librarian, Silverton Public Library, for her assistance in researching the microfilm copies of the Silverton newspapers.

Special thanks also go to Richard Wagner, Telluride's nationally known artist, for his cover sketch of Silverton's Grand Imperial Hotel and "Yesteryear's" Greene Street scene. His paintings may be seen in the collections of the Library of Congress, Denver Art Museum, University of Colorado, Dartmouth College, Rochester Museum and others.

INTRODUCTION

The roads that led to Silverton before 1879 were so poor that they weren't even in the wagon road category and no stage coach lines made runs into the city. The expression "You can't get there from here" accurately described the predicament. However, toll roads were soon pushed over the passes and the mining camp rapidly expanded to become the commercial center of the San Juan Mountains and the Narrow Gauge Railroad Capitol of the United States, with four companies having lines in the area at one period. Silvertonites were proud of their city and it became known as the "Silver Queen of Colorado" and the "Treasury Chest of the San Juans". Many western towns have faced adversity and survived, yet few have overcome the odds that Silverton did. The miners had to adjust to the rigors of mining at elevations that sometimes exceeded 12,000 feet, severe winters and excessive snow depths, avalanche disasters, fluctuating metal prices and the ever-elusive San Juan veins. The town somehow survived numerous metal depressions, business failures, mine shutdowns, and isolation due to blockades that sometimes lasted for several weeks. Fortunately, the town and its people "never gave up" and the visitor today can enjoy the "climate" of a century-old mining town in the San Juans.

HOTEL GRAND.



A. W. DANES, PROP.

Three-Story Brick Structure Centrally Located in Post-Office Block. Rooms Well Ventilated. Incandescent Light, Everything First-Class. Commodious Sample Rooms.

SILVERTON,

-

COLORADO.

The Grand Hotel, as it appeared in the 1891 Colorado State Business Directory published by James R. Ives.

(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)



Silverton, Colorado with Sultan Mountain in background, taken from city reservoir, September 20, 1888. (Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



Burros loaded with track iron for mines near Silverton. The burro behind the gentleman on the left is carrying the bin portion of an ore car. Picture taken on 13th Street around 1900. (Denver Public Library, Western History Department)

CHAPTER I

EARLY EXPLORERS AND PROSPECTORS

Of the many once-thriving mining camps that were built along the headwaters of the Rio de las Animas (River of Lost Souls) in the 1870's, only Silverton remains. Howardsville, Niegoldstown, Highland Mary, Middleton, Eureka, Animas Forks, Mineral Point, Poughkeepsie, Gladstone, Chattanooga, Summit and Congress persist today only as rusted and weathered reminders of the role their former residents played in the settlement of the San Juan Mountains.

San Juan County is the heart of an area known as the San Juan Mining District and Silverton, located some 9300 feet above sea level, is the county seat. The county and district take their names, of course, from the imposing mountain range that dominates southwestern Colorado. San Juan County, one of the few counties in the United States that does not have even one acre devoted to agriculture, is the fifth smallest in the state. The surface is extremely rugged with numerous peaks that exceed 13,000 feet in elevation and a few narrow, precipitous-walled valleys. Accordingly, mining and tourism have been the backbone of the county since the 1880's. Old-time residents like to tell tourists that Silverton is the "Top of the world" and only two directions are needed to get somewhere — "uphill" or "downhill".

It is not surprising that the rugged San Juan Mountain region resisted gold and silver seekers until a comparatively late period in history, when one realizes southwestern Colorado was also the home of the war-like Ute Indians. In 1868 the United States initiated a treaty with the Utes and the western one-third of Colorado was set aside for their reservation. Following the Civil War, gold seekers and farmers headed for southwestern Colorado. The "San Juans or Bust" slogan became as popular as "Pikes Peak" or "California or Bust" of two decades earlier. It soon became an impossible task for the army to keep the miners and farmers off the Ute lands; consequently, Congress negotiated a new treaty with the Ute Indians which further reduced the extent of their reservation. In 1873 the Utes ceded the San Juan Mountain area to the United States. The terms of this treaty, the Brunot Agreement, threw the area open for settlement and during the summer of 1874 it has been estimated that 2,000 men came into the Silverton district alone.

There are no early records to indicate the Spanish, Mexicans, or fur trappers penetrated the region of the headwaters of the Animas River. However, it is probable that early Spanish explorers, on unofficial, clandestine mining expeditions, visited the area presently known as Silverton and Baker's Park. Don Bernard Miera y Pacheco's was the



This photo of a Ute mother and papoose is believed to have been taken at the Southern Ute Agency at Ignacio, Colorado in the late 1890's. The Utes, joined in a loose confederation of seven bands, were the oldest, continuous residents of Colorado and their presence discouraged the exploration and settlement of southwestern Colorado by the Spanish as early as 1637. Today the Mousache and Capote bands make up the Southern Utes and their agency headquarters is at Ignacio, Colorado. The Weeminuchas are now called the Ute Mountain Utes with headquarters at Towaoe, Colorado. The remaining four bands now comprise the Northern Utes and their tribal headquarters is at Fort Duchesne, Utah.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



One of the most frequent snow slide areas on the D&RGW was some 4.5 miles south of Silverton. The 150 foot long snow shed constructed where avalanches were especially severe was removed during the 1940's. Both pictures were taken at the old snow shed site during the winter of 1952. Silverton was often besieged by blockades due to avalanches. During the winter of 1884 the railroad line was blocked for 73 continuous days and the residents had to depend upon pack trains to deliver food and essential supplies.

(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)

cartographer and astronomer for the Dominguez and Escalante expedition of 1776. His map of 1778 is surprisingly accurate in the portrayal of the Animas River and the adjacent mountain ranges. Since the expedition did not venture up the Animas River, his information must have been obtained from earlier travelers. In 1919 a Howardsville resident found a Spanish coin dated 1772 several feet underground while digging a cellar. Perhaps, at some future date, Spanish or Mexican records will be uncovered that will shed new light on the exploration of southwestern Colorado.

The earliest recorded gold discovery in the San Juan Mountains is credited to a man named Stewart, who as a member of J. C. Fremont's ill-fated, fourth (and nearly his last) expedition of 1848, discovered small amounts of placer gold somewhere between the headwaters of the San Juan River and the La Garita Mountains. He kept his discovery secret and returned the following year, but was unable to re-locate his find and the discovery went unheralded. While there are numerous, recorded prospecting expeditions to the San Juan Mountains between then and 1860, Charles Baker has been credited with leading the first prospectors into the upper reaches of the Animas River and discovering placer gold. To this day, Charles Baker's motives in attempting to settle the area remain in question. His personal ties to land development and proposed toll roads into the area from Abiquiu, New Mexico are well-documented. His allegiance to the Confederacy is also known. Perhaps the man was nothing more than a promoter whose luck eventually ran out. His own followers threatened to hang him on two separate occasions; in one instance by a party of miners in the Baker's Park area when they found he had grossly exaggerated the gold value of the placers, and the second time for insisting his friends journey into an undeveloped area in which he had a personal, financial interest, without preparing them for the hardships they had to endure. His death in 1867 is also somewhat a mystery. A companion reported he was killed during an Indian attack. Some suspected at the time, that his companion may have murdered him.

Charles Baker and a small party of men (accounts vary from six to twenty) left Denver in July 1860 for the San Juan Mountains and the headwaters of the Animas River. They were trespassing on Ute lands and faced the threat of constant harassment. Small amounts of placer gold were discovered by the party in the Baker's Park area, known today as Silverton. Within a few month's time several townsites were laid out, numerous mining districts organized, and toll roads proposed. During the summer and fall, additional parties left Denver and Abiquiu for the "San Juan mines". One group of miners built cabins to over-winter in old Animas City, which had been located to the north of present day Durango. By late fall, Baker and others had circulated sensational



View from the rear of mixed train (passenger and freight) as it rounds a curve enroute to Silverton along the Animas River canyon. The train made bi-weekly runs on Tuesday and Saturdays only. July 20, 1943.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)

reports about the valuable mines found in the San Juans. A winter rush to the area began, and all who undertook the hazardous journey suffered; some died. In mid-December of 1860 one party known as the Baker Expedition, consisting of close to three hundred men, women and children plus livestock, left Denver for the San Juan diggings. After enduring severe hardships in the wind-swept snow and crossing the Sangre de Cristo pass in mid-winter they eventually reached the present site of Pinkerton Hot Springs near old Animas City, in March. Their travels had taken them to Fort Garland, Conejos, and on to the important early trade centers of Ojo, Caliente, old Chama, Abiquiu, Tierra Amarilla and to the hot springs of present day Pagosa Springs. Baker and a few men over-wintered that year in Baker's Park to work their diggings, believed to be at the present day site of Eureka. Gold values were low and the cost of provisions were high. Animas City had the only permanent type log cabins, and they were few in number. Baker had grossly exaggerated the merits of the townsites, as well as the gold values. The recent arrivals, as well as those who had arrived the previous year, became discouraged and returned to Denver or went prospecting elsewhere. The beginning of hostilities in the Civil War quickly ended mining and prospecting in the area, and the townsites and mine diggings were abandoned. Baker is believed to have joined the Confederates. His exact whereabouts during and immediately following the war, are uncertain until he returned to the Territory in 1867, only to be killed while exploring the San Juan River region the same year.



CHAPTER II

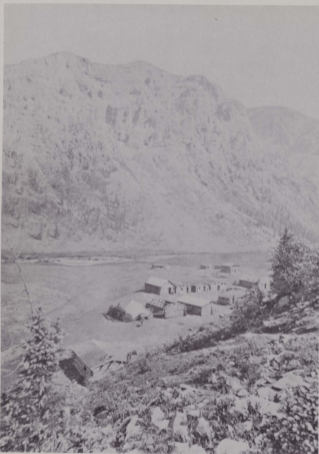
EARLY SILVERTON & SURROUNDING MINE CAMPS

Small amounts of placer gold were discovered in Arrastra Gulch to the north of present day Silverton in 1870. This occurrence, and other reports of mineral wealth, again attracted adventurous prospectors to the San Juan Mountains. In 1871 Governor Pile of New Mexico, sent out prospectors who discovered the Little Giant lode, the first successful gold mine in the district. The ore averaged \$150 per ton in gold values and twenty-seven tons were mined and milled in a primitive Mexican style arrastra. During 1872, troops were sent to the region to keep the miners out and to maintain peace between the Utes and the whites while the government negotiated a new treaty, the Brunot Agreement, to reduce the size of the Ute reservation.

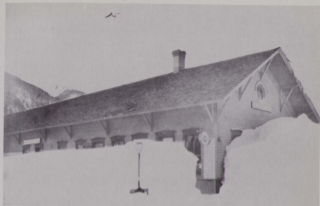
During the same year, the Little Giant was equipped with the latest machinery that included a 12-horsepower engine and a 1000 foot wire rope tram to carry ore from the mine to the mill. In 1873 it produced about \$12,000 in values out of a total of about \$15,000 for the entire region. Prospectors were beginning to move into the area, a few cabins were being built at Animas Forks, Mineral Point and Howardsville, and miners were working the present day Sunnyside mine area near Eureka. Those were exciting times! The nearest post office, newspaper, bank or supply point was Del Norte, 125 miles distant. The U.S. Senate ratified the Brunot Agreement in April 1874 and the main "rush to the San Juans" began. Many of these men were miners from the older mine camps west of Denver, bringing valuable mineral experience with them.

Between 1870 and 1874, about 80% of the claims staked were for silver, rather than gold. The miners did not receive payment for the gold content of their ore if it was less than one ounce per ton and most of the discoveries along the Animas lacked sufficient gold to qualify. In 1874 the machinery for the Greene Smelter was packed in on burros over Cunningham Gulch at a freight rate of twenty-five cents per pound, and assembled just north of Silverton. This small smelter, with a daily capacity of only twelve tons, smelted nearly \$400,000 worth of silver-lead bullion by 1879, when it was moved to Durango. The bullion was shipped by pack train over the mountain range to the nearest road and on by wagon to the railroad terminus at Pueblo. As roads improved, freight rates dropped consistently from \$60 per ton in 1876 to \$30 per ton upon completion of the Stony Pass wagon road in 1879.

In 1874 Howardsville, being the principle settlement in the Baker's Park area, was made the county seat of the newly-acquired La Plata County. Within a few months the county seat was moved to the rapidly



Howardsville, on the Bullion City townsite, as it appeared in 1874. In 1933 W. H. Jackson is reported to have identified and dated the photograph as taken in 1874 when he accompanied the U. S. Geological Survey of the territories, Prof. F. U. Hayden in charge. The picture also appeared as one of the popular stereoscopic views of the day in "Views along the Rocky Mountains of Colorado". (Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)



The Denver & Rio Grande depot at Silverton, March 1952. The depot is owned by the San Juan County Historical Society and currently leased to Sundance Ltd., publishers and printers of books, especially railroad books on the southwest.

(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)



During the spring of 1930(?) the Needleton slide was so severe that it required the D&RGW ditcher, "Ox", to help clear the tracks.

(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)

growing southern portion of Baker's Park, which, according to legend, had been christened "Silverton" by one of the ever-optimistic miners, proclaiming that while his claim had no gold, it did contain "silver by the ton". The early mine camps grew rapidly and additional camps were established at the location of each major discovery. By 1875 Silverton had a population of 100 sturdy souls, a post office, sawmill, grocery, blacksmith, general merchandise store, newspaper, two liquor stores, two smelters, one territorial assayer, in addition to county officials. When San Juan County was formed from a portion of La Plata County in 1876 and Silverton was named the county seat, it listed 500 registered voters. The "La Plata Miner", Silverton's first newspaper, was printed on July 10, 1875 on machinery packed over the mountains from Wagon Wheel Gap. Publication of the paper continues today as "The Silverton Standard and the Miner" and is Colorado's oldest newspaper west of the Continental Divide and one of the oldest in the United States west of the Rocky Mountains. As the city grew, the early settlers were honored by having the streets named after them.

The transportation of foodstuffs, mine supplies, and mail to the area was difficult as was shipping bullion and ore out. During the 1870's the main route to Silverton was from Del Norte, along the Rio Grande River by way of Antelope Park and Cunningham Gulch. It was an arduous trip as evidenced by the fact that in 1873 it required a full two weeks time to move the machinery for Silverton's first sawmill from Del Norte to Howardsville. In 1875 the wagon road that terminated at Antelope Park was extended to Lake City. San Juan City, an early mining camp in Antelope Park and the first capitol of Hindsdale County, was a connecting station between Del Norte and Silverton. It was not until mid-1879 that a wagon road from Antelope Park was connected to Silverton by way of steep, rough and often snow-swept (even in summer) Stony Pass that crossed the Continental Divide, the apex of the Pacific and Atlantic watersheds, at an elevation of 12,590 feet. Roads were being built or extended throughout the San Juans. In 1875 construction commenced on the first road connecting Silverton and Howardsville to Eureka, Animas Forks and Mineral Point. A major portion of the Animas City (Durango) toll road was built in 1875 and completed in 1879. Otto Mears, the proverbial "pathfinder of the San Juans", is credited with building more than 400 miles of toll roads in the San Juan Mountains.

Silverton and the near-by camps soon had difficulty in receiving mail from Del Norte, especially during the winter and spring months. It seems that some of the carriers had a habit of dumping the mail along Stony Gulch and others merely left it to stack up in a corner of the post office. During February 1879, arrangements were made for "two of the best mountain men available" to carry the mail between Silverton and

Grassy Hills, the most difficult part of the route. Grassy Hills was a stage stop east of the Continental Divide and some 13 miles east of Silverton. Highland Mary was a small camp, huddled around a mine of the same name at the head of Cunningham Gulch. Ben Harwood would make the run from Silverton to the Highland Mary, where he would meet John Small from Grassy Hills. Mail would be exchanged and the men would retrace their respective routes. Within a few months the La Plata Miner reported that "the mail came in on time and as regular as clockwork". Ben Harwood carried the mail on snowshoes for several winters. In addition to the mail, he often packed from 50 to 80 pounds of food and mine supplies on his back for the Highland Mary mine. Snow slides often took their toll of those who packed the mail over the mountain passes during the winter and spring months. Swan Nilson was one who lost his life. While making the run from Silverton to Ophir just prior to Christmas 1883, he was engulfed by a slide near the treacherous Ophir Pass. His body, with its undelivered Christmas mail, was not found until 2 years later when the receding snow gave up its victim.

Animas Forks was a lively town in 1876 with prospectors, miners, promoters and pack trains arriving and departing from all directions. Silverton lay 13 miles southwest and Lake City 40 miles to the northeast. A trail to the east led over Cinnamon Pass to Tellurium, White Cross, Sherman, Carson and on to Lake City. The trail to the west followed Mastodon Gulch and California Gulch. The route to the north forked about a mile from town, the trail to the left leading off to Mineral Point and Ouray, and the main route continuing on over 13,000 foot Engineer Pass, down Henson Creek to Rose's cabin, Capitol City, and Lake City. The elevation was 11,300 and the residents proclaimed that they lived in the largest city in the world at so high an elevation! It was a bustling town and by 1876 it boasted of about 30 cabins, a post office, saloon, general store, hotel, two mills, and a population of two hundred or so. During 1877 the county-owned wagon road from Eureka was extended up the Animas River to Animas Forks and Mineral Point. This road was later improved by Otto Mears in the 1880's. By 1885 its population was around 450 and the town was on the daily stage run from Lake City to Silverton. Animas Forks was also one of the few small mine camps to have its own newspaper, The Animas Forks Pioneer, which was published from June 1882 to October 1886. Animas Forks' early decline, like that of most mining camps, was as rapid as was its rise. By 1901 many of the buildings were deserted as the town was built on hopes that never materialized. Between 1904 and 1916 the town experienced a resurgence of activity with the extension of the Silverton Northern Railroad from Eureka and the construction of the Gold Prince Mill and connecting tramway to the Gold Prince mine, located at the head of Mastodon Gulch. The mill operated until around 1910 and was



"Col." Frances M. Snowden and the cabin he built in Silverton in 1874. The site is where the Silverton Miners Union Hospital now stands. Mr. Snowden's cabin was the first one built in Silverton. Circa 1890's. (Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



Silverton around 1910, as seen from the city reservoir area north of town. The track of the Silverton Gladstone and Northern heading up Cement Creek, can be seen in the foreground. The town appears dwarfed by the peaks of Sultan Mountain.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



The Mogul Mill was built in Gladstone around 1904. A one and three quarter mile aerial tramway connected the mill to the mine adit located south of Hurricane Peak at an elevation of 11,400 feet. At the time of this photograph (late 1930's) the mill had been abandoned and the town of Gladstone was in various stages of disrepair. The tracks of the Silverton Northern (formerly SG&N) had not been used since 1924. The repeated flooding of Cement Creek had covered the tracks with silt and debris.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)

finally dismantled in 1917, after which time Animas Forks faded again, becoming a ghost town by the 1920's. A few picturesque houses and cabins are all that remain of its former prominence.

Mineral Point, originally named Mineral City, was one of the earliest camps in the San Juans and was established prior to Animas Forks, around 1873. With the exception of the near-by Old Lout mine, the prospects in the area were financial failures. Between 2 and 3 million dollars was dishonestly, or foolishly, squandered on mine ventures with few, or no, substantial developments undertaken that would assist mining or exploration, then or in the future. All mining camps had their promoters, but those in Mineral Point excelled at their trade. To illustrate how accessible the area was to outside commerce, one stock scheme included a sketch of a river steamboat on the headwaters of the Animas River with the mines of the area in the foreground! The settlement, while enjoying an early boom when thousands joined the rush in search of quick, but not necessarily easy, riches, contained no substantial buildings. The few pictures that exist today, show several small, close-spaced, poorly-constructed log cabins. The town probably never had more than a population of 100, a post office, store, rooming house and a couple of saloons. The citizens of the town once boasted that their post office (elevation 11,500 feet) was the highest in the land. By 1890 the town had been practically abandoned and for the next few years the cabins were occasionally occupied by miners or prospectors working in the area. With the exception of a few scattered rock foundations, no actual evidence of the town can be found today.

Eureka, like many of the early mine camps, was a town whose very existence depended upon the success or failure of a single mine and mill. The Sunnyside mine area, located high above the valley floor in a glacial basin some three miles west and 2000 feet higher than the town, was originally worked for gold in 1873 when the land still belonged to the Ute Indians. The growth of Eureka was slow and during the late 1870's it had about twenty houses. By 1885 its population had increased to 150 and included a post office, notary public, restaurant, butcher shop, livery stable, two saloons, and numerous mining company offices. The complex nature of the Sunnyside mine ores containing gold, lead, zinc, silver, copper and manganese made milling difficult. The mining problems were also intensified by the large tonnage of low grade ores that could not be concentrated, as the technology to mill these ores had not been developed. Between the late 1870's (when the early gold values diminished), and the mid-1890's, the mill operators were unable to make a good recovery of the metal values and the operations were often marginal. In 1899 a three mile long cable-tramway was built connecting the mine and former mill to a new mill that had recently been constructed at Eureka and equipped to utilize the latest recovery processes.



"The first pack train from Ouray to Silverton, March 4, 1932". Pack trains have been used in the Rocky Mountains since the Spanish first came into the area. Forest rangers, geologists, and cattle and sheep men still use them today to pack in supplies to remote areas.
(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)



A burro pack team momentarily resting just prior to hitting the trail to some isolated mine camp in the San Juan Mountains. A. W. Helmbold's store in Eureka as it appeared between 1893 and 1902. The store contained general merchandise and a fresh meat market.
(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)



The Gold King Mill and Gladstone as it looked around 1906 from mid-point on the Gold King Tramway. The tramway continued on up the mountain to the main adit (12,000 feet in elevation) just below Bonita Peak and was capable of running 300 to 400 buckets, each carrying 700-800 pounds of ore per day. The tracks of the Silverton, Gladstone and Northerly can be seen winding down Cement Creek. The two large multiple story buildings in Gladstone were boarding houses. The Gold King Mine also had a "Typical San Juan" 4-story boarding house at the main adit level. The Mogul Mill is to the right of town and partially hidden by the trees.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



Animas Forks, as it appeared in the 1890's. One of the few remaining buildings that can be readily identified is the "Walsh house" in the right center foreground.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



The imposing Gold Prince mill, one of the largest in the state, dwarfs Animas Forks and the valley in this 1905 photo. Two miles of rugged mountain terrain separated the mill from the mine. The aerial tram went up the left hillside.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)

Within a short period, both the old and new mills were operating satisfactorily and low-grade ores were successfully concentrated and amalgamated. This started a new period of mine development. By 1902 the Sunnyside and the Sunnyside Extension mines ranked third in production for the county. During 1918 a larger mill with a capacity of 500 tons per day began operations. This mill, a pioneer in its field, was the first commercial, selective lead-zinc flotation mill in the country. In 1928 the mill capacity was increased to 1000 tons. Between the years of 1918 and 1938 the mine and mill were shut down three times due to low metal prices. Other shutdowns were due to fires, excessive snow depths, slides, lack of labor, tramway breakdowns, and erratic electrical power delivery. Between 1930 and 1937 the mine and mill were inactive. In 1937 the operations were re-activated, only to be suspended during 1938, after which the mill was dismantled. Operations of the Silverton Northern Railroad ceased during 1940-1941, and the road was abandoned during 1942. Eureka, unlike Silverton, Telluride, or Rico, was known as a relatively tame town. The Sunnyside Mining and Milling Company owned about 75% of all the buildings. It was a company mill town and most of the buildings, together with the mill, mines and equipment, were sold at a bankruptcy court to U. S. Smelting, Refining and Mining Company in August 1948. Some of the buildings and houses were moved to Silverton and to the Idarado mine between Red Mountain Pass and Ouray. The remainder of the buildings were dismantled and the lumber and fixtures sold. Between 1917 and 1938 approximately 2.5 million tons of ore with a gross metal value of about 50 million dollars were mined and milled at Eureka. Today ore is removed from the Sunnyside mine by way of the American Tunnel that was driven some 6500 feet from its portal, located at Gladstone.

During 1879 a wagon road was completed from Silverton eight miles up Cement Creek to the new settlement of Gladstone, and on over the mountains to the head of Poughkeepsie Gulch, the site of new mining activity. A small ore treating plant with a capacity of about six tons per day had recently been erected at Gladstone, which was located on some of the early trails, and near others which connected Silverton to the Red Mountain prospects, and to Ouray. Pack trains were constantly on the move; miners and supply wagons were heading for the Poughkeepsie Gulch mines and prospects with a like number of miners and ore-laden wagons returning to Silverton. During its early days, Gladstone consisted of only a few cabins and a boarding house run to accommodate the employees of the mines and mills in the area. During 1887 the Gold King mine was discovered. However, it was not until the mid-1890's that underground development paid off and the "virtual gold mine" that the property was to be, became apparent to the new owners. The boom was on and the temporary population of the town soon ap-

proached 2000. Numerous additional mines were also being opened up nearby. During April 1899 the stockholders of the Gold King Mining Company voted to incorporate and charter the Silverton Gladstone Northerly Railroad. Freight rates for ore shipment and supplies from Silverton were high and could be reduced drastically if the Gold King Mining Company had its own railroad. By late July 1899 the railroad was completed by its builder, Rocky Mountain Construction Company. During the same year the Gold King mill was equipped with a new 100 ton amalgamation and concentration mill. By 1902 the Gold King Consolidated mine was the largest producer in the county, and the mill capacity had been increased to 200 tons per day. The Gold King mine operated with the usual shutdowns due to fires, litigation, and labor disputes, until 1918, when it closed, not to re-open until 1924. By the late 1940's the Gold King mine group had produced ore with a gross value of more than \$8 million and it ranked as one of the county's main metal producers. Although there were other mines and mills in the area, the prosperity of Gladstone paralleled that of the Gold King mine. By late 1885 the town had a population of around 100, a general store, two mills, a sawmill, several mines and a small boarding house. Like Eureka, the town was a company town and most of the buildings were controlled by the owners of the Gold King Mining properties. With the eventual closing of the mines and mill and the cessation of rail transportation, the residents drifted to Silverton or elsewhere. The buildings were eventually dismantled, moved, destroyed or used as storage by the personnel of the American Tunnel and later the Standard Metals Corporation. Because of its close proximity to Silverton, the early day commercial district had no reason to expand past the necessity of a general store or two, a boarding house and restaurant. The railroad was not used after 1924 and the line was officially abandoned in 1937. The portal of the American Tunnel adjoins the old Gladstone town area. The veins of the Gold King mines are now accessible at depths never realized by the miners of the 1880's-1920's.

The mine camp of Poughkeepsie, whose elevation exceeded 11,000 feet, was located to the north of Lake Como at the head of Poughkeepsie Gulch, twelve miles northwest of Silverton and eight miles south of Ouray. The 200 or so summer residents who mined and prospected the area during the late 1870's and early 1880's proudly referred to their camp as the "biggest little mining camp in the San Juan Country". The Poughkeepsie Mining District is in an area that is extremely rugged with steep slopes and many sheer cliffs and receives heavy snows from late fall to late spring. The townsite that was platted at the junction of the Uncompahgre River and Poughkeepsie Gulch was apparently never settled. During the 1870's high grade ores were packed by burro to Rose's cabin for further freighting to Crooke's works in Lake City for milling and smelting. After 1879 the ores mined at the head of



Eureka, as it appeared in the 1920's from the camera's eye atop the Sunnyside mill. All that is left today are portions of three old cabins, the remains of the town's water tower, and the crumbling foundations of the Sunnyside mill.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



Eureka in the 1920's. The "new" Sunnyside mill completely dominated the town. The aerial tram to the mine paralleled the canyon to the rear left. Steel for the mill was obtained from the abandoned Gold Prince mill at Animas Forks.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)

Poughkeepsie Gulch were usually freighted over the 12,000 foot high pass to the Gladstone works on Cement Creek for milling. In 1885 the camp had a post office, several small restaurants and saloons, and a summer population that approached 250, and stage connections to Gladstone and Silverton. The mines of the district were divided into two groups: those of Upper Poughkeepsie Gulch (Lake Como area) and those of the Lower Gulch. The Lake Como area had about 150 prospects and mines all contained in about 1.5 square miles. All the terrain was above 11,200 feet, with half the prospects above 12,000. The ore bodies, while rich, were small tonnage and discontinuous and soon played out. The most important mine in the district was the Old Lout, located in the Lower Poughkeepsie Gulch area. This mine produced about \$400,000 worth of rich silver ore between 1876 and 1900. The camp of Poughkeepsie soon faded as the rich ores played out and more substantial finds were struck elsewhere. Within a few years the camp was abandoned. The difficult travel conditions, high elevation, severe winters, and general remoteness of the area had hastened its demise. Little remains today of this remote, alpine camp where freight rates for supplies were so high that cattle were often driven from Silverton "on the hoof" to be slaughtered. This was a common mine camp practice in the early days when roads were primitive or non-existent.

During the early 1880's Chattanooga, located at the base of Red Mountain nine miles northwest of Silverton and seventeen miles south of Ouray, was an important junction point for freighters. The early wagon road, built from Silverton, had ended there and only pack animals could continue the climb following the steep trail that led to the mine camps of the Red Mountain area. The ore was packed in canvas sacks and transported by pack trains to Chattanooga to be unloaded for further shipment by wagon to Silverton. Accordingly, supplies would be freighted from Silverton to Chattanooga and loaded on burros for further transportation to the mines. The rich silver discoveries in the Red Mountain area between 1881 and 1883 created a building boom in the town that was destined to be short-lived. In November 1884 Otto Mears completed his Silverton and Red Mountain toll and wagon road. It was now possible for the miners to make direct ore shipments by wagon from the Red Mountain mines to Silverton. This resulted in a considerable lowering of freight rates, and Chattanooga no longer was an important transfer point. By 1885 it was a settlement of sixty permanent residents and boasted a post office, hotel, saloon, and store. It was also connected by stage to Ouray, Silverton and the numerous Red Mountain camps. Its importance continued to dwindle with the 1888 completion of Otto Mears' Silverton Railroad connecting Silverton to the towns of Chattanooga, Red Mountain, Guston and Ironton. During the fall of 1890, when Red Mountain Town



W. H. Jackson photograph of D&RGW train crossing original wooden bridge which spanned the Rio de las Animas Perdidas (River of Lost Souls) between Durango and Silverton. Circa 1890's.
(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)



A two-engine passenger train enroute from Silverton to Durango paused near Rockwood long enough for W. H. Jackson to photograph it — probably around 1890. This was one of Jackson's more famous railroad pictures. The ledge for the track bed was cut from solid rock by men using hand held steel and black powder.
(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)

was in its heyday and the great mines were operating full blast with saloons and gambling halls open day and night to accommodate the miners coming off shift, Chattanooga had only two adult residents; one operated a saloon and half-way house for travellers, and the other, a widow, took in washings to support her children. A portion of the town had been devastated by a snowslide several years previous and no one had bothered to rebuild. In 1890 the Silver Ledge mine was in production and for a while it appeared that the town might benefit from its operation and become a camp for the miners and mill men. However, the surface mine structures burned in 1891. The mine was re-activated, despite several shutdowns, and operations resumed with a larger mill equipped to handle 200 tons per day in 1902. During 1904 magnetic separating equipment was installed to separate the iron from the lead-zinc-iron ore, making this mill the first in San Juan County to recover zinc as a marketable product. However, the mine was soon closed down, partially due to the fluctuating metal prices. When the Silverton Railway was finally abandoned in 1922, less than twenty-five people lived along its entire route between Silverton and the portal of the Joker Tunnel above Ironton. Today, only a few weathered boards and foundation stones mark the site where Chattanooga once stood. The roadbed of Otto Mears' railroad to Red Mountain can still be seen in places along the hairpin curve on the highway at the foot of Red Mountain. This sharp turn parallels the most famous curve, "the Chattanooga Loop", on the Silverton Railway.

Congress, or Congress Town, as it was often called, grew up near the Congress mine that was discovered in the fall of 1881. During 1883 the mine produced 2500 tons of high grade gold-silver-lead-copper ore worth \$220,000. Congress, located at an elevation of 11,400 feet, was just south of the Ouray-Silverton County line, three-fourths of a mile south of Red Mountain Town. In 1884 it had a population of fifty, a post office, several stores and a two-story hotel. The Congress mine soon shut down, was re-opened in 1899 only to be shut down again in 1900. When the railroad grade to the Red Mountain mines didn't follow the wagon road to Congress, but took a more direct route to Summit, the townspeople moved the remaining businesses to the thriving town of Red Mountain. With the exception of a few pictures, mining and court-house records, there is no evidence today that the town ever existed.

Middleton, at one time had a school building and several cabins. The town stood at the mouth of Maggie Gulch, two miles northeast of Howardsville. It was not founded until the early 1890's, and was abandoned by the early 1900's, even though two nearby mines, the Hamlet and Gold Nugget, were good producers. The town was later flanked by two mills, the Kittimac and the Hamlet that were served by the railroad. The miners and their wives were not interested in living in

Middleton when they could settle in the established towns of Silverton, Howardsville or Eureka.

Howardsville was settled at the mouth of Cunningham Gulch where Cunningham Creek joins the Animas River and was named in honor of George Howard, who built the first cabin in 1872. The miners and pack trains had to pass by the settlement when they were enroute to Stony Pass, which was the most direct route between Del Norte and the newly found mines at the headwaters of the Animas River. Howardsville was the social and commercial center of the area from the very first, as two of the early successful mines, the Aspen and the Little Giant, were located in nearby Arrastra Gulch. At first the mail for the area was picked up at the Del Norte post office by anyone heading over Stony Pass. In June of 1874 a post office was established and Howardsville was made the county seat of La Plata County. It appeared that "good times" were ahead. However, San Juan County was formed from a portion of La Plata County and the county seat was moved to Silverton in the fall. In 1875, Howardsville, with a summer population of around 300, had a postmaster, assayer, attorney, blacksmith, constable, justice of the peace, surveyor, numerous buildings including a hotel, Fishers Brewery and several saloons. By 1890 practically all the business and professional people had moved to Silverton or other growing communities, and Howardsville's population had fallen to less than fifty full time residents. Cunningham Gulch and the neighboring Howardsville area was the site of numerous successful mines and mills that operated more or less continuously between 1880 and the present time. About a mile up Cunningham Gulch was an early settlement named Niegoldstown with a few cabins and a post office. The town was named for the Niegold brothers who built a concentration works to mill the ores from the Philadelphia and Pride of the West mines. The camp continued operations until about 1885. Howardsville became an important station stop on the Silverton Northern Railway during the early 1900's. The mines, however, were gradually shut down and trucks replaced rail traffic. Local post office service was discontinued in 1939. During the 1950's the two room log cabin that was Colorado's first courthouse west of the Continental Divide, burned and was destroyed. None of Howardsville's early buildings remain today.



CHAPTER III

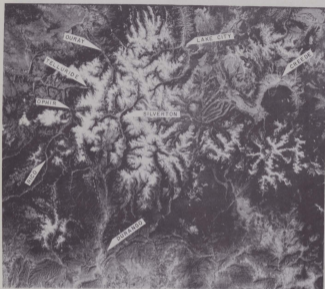
THE TOWN THAT WOULDN'T QUIT

The settlement that was soon to become the metropolis of the San Juans, had its beginnings in 1871 when Frances M. Snowden built his small log cabin with its dirt roof on a grassy flat at the base of Anvil Mountain. Snowden had recently arrived from Del Norte and found the area to his liking. An earlier cabin had been built by Tom Blair at his "ranch" near where Cement Creek first enters Baker's Park. However, the area north of present day Silverton was never platted or brought into the city. Additional cabins soon "sprung up", some near Blair's cabin and others to the south, near Snowden's. The building activity to the south soon out-paced that of the north, and the town of Silverton was platted in September 1874 at its present location.

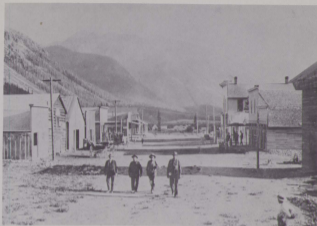
By 1880 rail service had advanced as far west as Alamosa, the jumping-off place for the San Juan mine camps. Upon arrival of the train from Denver and Pueblo, the Southern Overland Mail and Express of Barlow and Sanderson Stage Company, departed for Del Norte, Wagon Wheel Gap, Antelope Springs and Lake City. Connections with the Brewster Stage Line were made at Antelope Springs, to complete the difficult trip, during the summer and fall months, over Stony Pass to Silverton. Rio Grande Railway fares between Denver and Alamosa were \$23 and the stage fare on to Silverton was \$32. Meals at the stage stations, consisting of strong, boiled coffee and whatever they had prepared at the time, served family style, were available for 75 cents. The distance from Alamosa to Silverton by stage was listed at 143 miles. However, the effect of the multitudinous ruts and chuck holes encountered by all four wheels simultaneously, must have led the travellers to believe the distance was twice that.

For a long period, pack animals and trails were the only means of transportation. Road construction was difficult and the mountain passes were often snowed under for nine months of the year. Packing supplies in and bullion out by pack trains was expensive; the cost of transporting ore to the railroad in 1876 was \$60 per ton, \$56 per ton in 1877, and \$40 per ton in 1878. The average smelting cost was \$100 per ton. Many mines could not profitably ship any ores, except carefully sorted, high-grade, to the mills. The construction of toll roads and passable wagon roads was a necessity for the survival of all the towns and camps. In 1877, the first Article of Incorporation was filed in the Silverton Courthouse for the Rio Grande and Animas Wagon Road Company and its proposed 43 mile toll road between the Del Norte and Antelope Park Toll Road and Silverton, by way of Stony Pass and Cunningham Gulch. This was followed by a barrage of proposed roads, in-





A NASA ERTS photograph taken by satellite of the San Juan Mountain region on 25 June 1976. The white areas are snow packs that still cover the higher mountain elevations. The darker vein-like patterns are rivers and drainage areas. Many of the early day trails and passes still remain blocked in mid-June. The difficulty the early miners experienced in developing mines above 10,000 feet elevation in the San Juan Mountains is easy to imagine.



As Eureka's importance dwindled, weeds started growing in the center of "Main Street". A Sunday stroll during the 1920's.

(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)



"Du Pont Express", Silverton, probably early 1920's. Packing is an art; the load must be properly balanced and tied. A burro is some times almost hidden by its load. In early days freight rates averaged \$2.50 per 100 lbs.

(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)

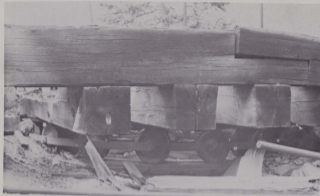
cluding in 1879, a proposed railroad from the mouth of Blue River in Grand County, south to the Roaring Fork River and Rock Creek, on to Lake City, Silverton, Parrott City, Animas City, and terminating at the New Mexico border. This would be a formidable task, even with today's equipment. Needless to say, some roads were completed at one time or another, and many others were not. The completion of the Stony Pass toll road in 1879, and its wagon road connecting Antelope Springs, San Juan, Lost Trail, Timber Hill, Grassy Hills, Niegoldstown, Howardsville and Silverton, together with the extension of the Denver and Rio Grande Railway from Durango to Silverton in July 1882, were the two most important transportation innovations ever made in the area. Freight rates were reduced with each improvement and miners were able to mine and transport lower grade ores, enabling new mines to open. Besides burros, mules and horses, dog teams were sometimes used as pack animals. During the spring of 1879, a dog team and sled owned by Mr. Schneider was used to haul water for domestic purposes to the residents of Silverton. The two dogs could haul sixty gallons, or 500 pounds, of water at a time. He also used his team to deliver lumber around town and they were capable of hauling 400 board feet in a single load. The editor, in the March 8 issue of the La Plata Miner, suggested that such a team of dogs would beat horses for carrying mail across the mountains during the winter.

Practically everyone who lived in Silverton in the early 1870's owned a mine or at least a claim or two. All conversations centered on each new find, always richer, wider, and having greater potential for instant wealth than the last. Meanwhile, the town was growing as additional men and some of their wives came to the San Juans. The first store is believed to have been built during 1874. In 1873, prior to the signing of the Brunot Agreement by the U. S. Senate, the first sawmill was delivered from the nearest railroad terminus at Colorado Springs, on to Del Norte and Howardsville, through the combined efforts of teams, wagons and ten men. The machinery weighed three tons and the freight charges were 16 cents per pound. The sawmill was built on Mineral Creek at the foot of Sultan Mountain, and furnished lumber for many of Silverton's first buildings. In 1875 when Silverton's first postmaster was appointed, there were no suitable buildings available for a post office. Consequently, the postmaster carried the "office around in his pocket" and distributed the mail on the streets to the appropriate recipients. A log schoolhouse was built in 1875 with funds raised by public subscription, with the understanding that the building was to be used for public meetings, as well as for church and school purposes. School opened that fall, but it was not until 1881 that nine month sessions were held. San Juan County had only one school district and as the other communities in the county, Howardsville, Eureka, Gladstone, Waldheim, Chat-

tanooga and Animas Forks, grew and required schools, the school board supplied the necessary facilities at each locality so that these children had the same educational opportunities as the ones living in Silverton. The Congregational Church Society was organized in early 1878 and they built their present day church in 1881. In 1882 the St. Patrick's Church was organized, followed by those of the Methodists, Episcopalians, and the Christian Scientists. The black community also formed its own church in the 1880's. Charles Fisher in 1878 moved his brewery from Howardsville to his new building on Mineral Creek, south of Silverton. By 1880 the town contained stores and shops of all kinds, whose shelves and storerooms were filled with great stocks of merchandise. Fraternal lodges, women's clubs, churches, saloons, gambling halls and dance halls flourished during the 1880's and early 1900's. Silverton's fraternal organizations were the center of much of the social activity and by 1885 the Grand Army of the Republic, International Order of the Odd Fellows, Masons, and Knights of Labor had been chartered. The number of lodges soon grew to eight, including the Miners Union, whose membership exceeded two thousand. Silverton had a few black residents and during 1885 the men ordered instruments and organized a band that performed at all the civic functions. At one period the Chinese population became quite large, and in retaliation for their growing number of businesses, the Caucasian merchants had the police "raid the Mongolians" and check all stores for proper licenses. In 1891 the Silverton Standard ran a typical, sharp news item as follows: "A Chinese Endeavor Society was organized at the Congregational Church last Sunday. The objects of the Society are to convert the Chinese and to induce them to handle soiled linen and red checks with more Christian charity."

As Silverton grew, so did the threat of fire, the plague of all mining camps. In 1879 fire fighting equipment, including a hook and ladder and hose cart, was ordered from Denver. When Silverton received the news that the equipment had arrived at Grassy Hills, many of the men went to Howardsville and Stony Pass to assist in hauling it on to town. The Silver Cornet Band had recently been formed and led the group to town where a dance was held to celebrate the occasion. The Silver Cornet Band appeared at official functions and holiday events as late as the early 1900's. The members of the Silverton Fire Department were all volunteers and, as was typical of the times, wore colorful parade uniforms, not unlike the marching drum majors of today, whenever there was a special occasion or holiday. The competition between fire fighting companies of neighboring towns was keen and special contests, including ladder and hose cart races, were held throughout the state. Each town thought their "boys" were the best.

During 1882 construction had begun on the Thompson Block, a four-



A close-up shot of the Corkscrew Gulch turntable and spider housing as it appeared when this photograph was taken in September 1975. The turntable measures 50 feet long and 14 feet wide. The side beams (upper beams in picture) are 15 inches high and 12 inches in width. The floor beams that rest on the spider or metal track and wheel assembly, measure 13 inches square. A covered snow shed was constructed over the turntable so that the heavy snows that prevail in the Red Mountain area did not interfere with winter operations.

(Jack L. Benham Collection)



Otto Mears' turntable on Corkscrew Gulch as it appeared in September 1975. The main line from Silverton approached the table from the left or south and departed on the barely discernible track bed to the left rear of the photograph, and on to the Silver Bell mine, Ironton and Albany. Aspens and 50 year old spruce trees have all but obliterated traces of the railroad bed by growing up between the ties.

(Jack L. Benham Collection)



Gladstone, as it looked in 1891. Gladstone was the terminal of the Silverton, Gladstone & Northerly Railroad, 7 miles up Cement Creek from Silverton. The Gold King mill stood across the road from the last building in the picture.

(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)



The Silverton, Gladstone & Northerly Railroad. The line, through its 6 short spurs, served all the major mines and mills enroute. During one severe winter, the passengers were stuck for 2 days while the tracks were cleared of snow.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



The boiler and headframe of the Mountain Queen mine guards the California Gulch approach to Hurricane Peak. This mine is one of the oldest in the area and it shipped 370 tons of high grade ore in 1877 by pack animals to the end of the Lake City road at Rose's cabin and on to the Crooke and Co. Smelter in Lake City. The jeep road continues on around the point below Hurricane Peak to the Lake Como and Upper Poughkeepsie mining areas. (Jack L. Benham Collection)



A Mineral Point mine as it appeared in August 1971. It was common practice for the miners to place a reinforced rock wall around steam boilers to conserve heat and serve as a barrier in case of boiler explosion. The wooden headframe above the shaft can be seen immediately behind the boiler. A steam operated winch lies rusting in the rarefied atmosphere on the picture's left. The present day jeep trail from Ouray and the Million Dollar Highway up the canyon of the Uncompaghre to Engineer Pass and Animas Forks, lies in the canyon to the rear of the picture. (Jack L. Benham Collection)

story stone and native brick building. Soon after its completion, a portion of the building was rented by Summa and Roe as the Grand Hotel. The building and its Grand Hotel were the pride of Silverton and the exterior appears today almost exactly as it did on July 1, 1883, when the hotel had its reception for the public. The hotel occupied portions of all four stories of the building with eighty rooms which were nicely finished and well-furnished to suit the taste of the most fashionable and aristocratic of guests. The dining room was on the street level and capable of seating 100 guests at a time. It was excellently furnished and presented an inviting appearance. A two-store addition to the Thompson Block once stood to the rear of the building and housed a kitchen, pastry room, and laundry on the main level and six rooms upstairs. In the basement, or sub-street level of the Thompson Block, was a saloon, separate billiard room, sample room for the commercial traveler to show his wares, and a baggage room for guests. The hardware firm of Kinnan and Farnsworth, one of the largest in the San Juans, rented almost half of the main level, occupying a fifty foot main street frontage on the corner. Due to a shortage of office space, hotel rooms were leased on the second floor for county offices and the third floor was used to accommodate the transients. The Thompson Block has housed, at one time or another, the Silverton Standard newspaper, Jack Slattery's Hub Saloon, a dry goods, men's clothing, and a hardware store. The Thompson Block and the Grand Hotel was the commercial and social center of town for many years. It has become a Silverton landmark and is known today as the Grand Imperial Hotel.

Silverton's Fourth of July celebration in 1883 lasted almost a week and was heralded at its conclusion as the "best since '76". The Silverton Jockey Club, founded some eight years previous, had spent months in preparation. A magnificent one-half mile oval race track surrounded by a tight, eight-foot board fence, a judges' stand, band set, and grandstand seating 1200 was finally completed on the last day of June. The track had been dragged, sprinkled, and rolled until it was as fine a race track as any. The events had been advertised on flyers and posted in all the camps throughout the area. The Denver and Rio Grande Railway had reduced the passenger rates to Silverton for the occasion and everyone was welcome. It was a three day celebration with over \$2000 to be given as prize money. The events included a circus on Monday the second, firemen's events, numerous horse, pony, and mule races on the fourth, followed that evening by the Grand Ball, sponsored by the Silverton Fireman's Association. A baseball game, with Silverton's team taking on all comers, rifle and shotgun matches, trotting races and the Grand Horse Race were scheduled for the fifth. Additional horse races, including the consolation race, miner's events and boxing matches were programmed for the last day. Of interest to all, was the

annual Hook and Ladder Race between the Silverton Fireman's Association and the Durango Hook and Ladder Company. The Durango team had beaten Silverton the previous year and had taken home the championship belt and the Silver Trumpet trophy. The Silverton team was determined to regain the trophies in 1883. The editor of the Silverton Democrat believed the home team could beat any fire company in this part of the state at any distance. All Silverton wondered how "the fire laddies and little cart" would fare against Durango, and "will the Durango boys go home weeping and wailing?" The answer was forthcoming on the afternoon of the Fourth. On July second, an immense crowd attended the afternoon and evening performances of John Robinson's Combined Circus and Menagerie. This was the first circus to appear in the San Juans and it played to a standing audience of miners and their families and every gulch and mine camp in the area was represented.

The morning of the Fourth was a beautiful day. 1200 people were packed in the grandstand and 2000 people were inside the enclosure, impatiently awaiting the commencement of the day's events. The special train carrying the Durango Hook and Ladder Company was late and the first event was delayed until afternoon. At about 1:30 P.M. the judges called the hook and ladder 500 foot race for the championship belt and \$50 cash. The Silverton team made the first run. When they stripped to their racing uniforms their appearance brought forth shouts of approval from the crowd. They all got off together and went by the grandstand "fairly flying over the ground". The ladder men did their work well, as did the climber, and the crowd gave them a good round of applause. The Durango team, dressed in white shirts and crimson knee britches, were deadly serious and also got off to a good start. However, as they passed the grandstand, it appeared that they were not as fast as the home team. The ladder work was superb, although the climber made a break. The teams were well-matched and the official time was: Silverton, 28 seconds, Durango 28¼ seconds. With this decision, the belt was passed to Silverton and the "Gem of the Rockies" was now entitled to claim the honor of having the fastest hook and ladder team in the San Juans.

However satisfying the day's events were to the Silvertonites, they were topped that evening by the Grand Ball, given by the Silverton Fireman's Association. The ball was a bright and joyous affair that lasted until 4:00 A.M. The firemen were dressed in their brilliant uniforms and the ladies in formal finery. The ballroom festivities were interrupted only once during the evening; at midnight, when the revelers made a mad rush to attend supper, which was being served at the newly-opened Grand Hotel.

The hose cart races held on the fifth and sixth were often temporarily



Poughkeepsie, 1901. The once-lively camp had been reduced to a propped-up cabin and a tent and board shack located just north of Lake Como. Abrams Mountain is the peak on the left.
(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



1888 Jackson photo of the Old Lout mine, showing upper shaft workings which were later abandoned when a tunnel was driven from a lower elevation in Poughkeepsie Gulch. Between 1876 and 1888 the mine produced around \$400,000 worth of rich silver ore.
(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



The Silverton Railroad as it appeared around the turn of the century at Chattanooga. The Chattanooga Loop is partially hidden by the trees in the background, but the 6% grade to the summit of Red Mt. Pass can be seen.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



Chattanooga Valley with its deserted townsite in the background and the Silver Ledge mine in the center front, as the area appeared in the 1920's. The abandoned railroad grade is in the grassy uppermost cut on the right.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)

delayed by showers. There were races for horses, mules and burros. There was feverish betting on well-known "favorites" by all who admired an attractive, dependable horse. Silverton's Fourth of July celebration was a success; the out-of-town contestants won 80% of the purse monies, as had been anticipated, and they went home happy. The 3500 or so visitors who had swelled Silverton's population to 5000, spent an estimated \$10,000 in town during their stay and the merchants and city officials were happy. Unfortunately, the treasury of the Jockey Club was several hundred dollars short of funds to pay all the debts incurred during the celebration and it became necessary to request additional donations to cover the deficit.

By the end of 1899 Silverton's population had reached 2000 permanent residents. The town had survived three business failures in the last ten years and the Silver Panic of 1893, that ruined so many mining towns and camps in the western United States when the price of silver fell from \$1.29 per ounce to 40 cents. The town's economy was dependent upon mining and the Silver Lake, Iowa, Gold King, Royal Tiger, Sunnyside and North Star were the main producers. Tourism was important, too, and guide books extolled the beauties of the mountain scenery, the richness of the mineral deposits and the healthful benefits of the area. In addition to the Silverton extension of the Denver and Rio Grande, the Silverton Railroad was transporting ore from Red Mountain while the Silverton Northern was carrying ore from Eureka and the mines of Arrastra Gulch and Silver Lake. Silvertonites even spoke optimistically of the proposed extension of the Gladstone Railroad to Lake City, which would reduce travel time to Denver by fourteen hours. Silverton's prosperity was also evident from the hundreds of horses, mules and burros that could be seen grazing on the mountain slopes near town.

During 1897 Louis Wyman had 120 pack animals and a number of teams bringing down ore from Solomon Mountain and his packing and freighting company was the largest in the area. He had begun his operation in 1885 with fifteen burros which he purchased in New Mexico. He employed 45 men and it required fifteen narrow gauge railcars of bailed hay and four cars of grain per month just to keep them in prime condition. His organization transported about 1500 tons of ore per month from the mines to the railroad. A good packer earned \$3.00 per day and his board. Teamsters commanded \$2.50. To win a bet of \$150, two packers, Frank Hendrix and George Alexander, once packed a 30-mule team with four 100 pound sacks per animal in the record time of twelve minutes, twenty-four seconds.

Silverton had two banks, the Bank of Silverton founded in 1880 by Colorado's banking family, the Thatcher Brothers of Pueblo, and the First National Bank, which opened in 1883. The Silverton Brewery,



Circa 1890's. A rare, early photo of Mineral Point that could have more appropriately been named Point Expectation. This camp was the scene of wild promotional schemes during this period. Better ore values elsewhere hastened its early demise.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



Mike O'Toole ran a clean hotel and restaurant-bar in Eureka during the early 1900's.
(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado. Donated by Mrs. Henry Swan.)



The abandoned boarding house alongside the Animas River just above Eureka as it appeared during October 1971. Massive three and four story boarding houses such as this were once commonplace throughout the San Juan Mountains, and were often the only home that an older, single miner might have. Some boarding houses allowed limited gambling, others did not, but all banned liquor.
(Jack L. Benham Collection.)

owned by Charles Fisher, was as fine as any in the state. It was equipped with the latest machinery and housed in a stone building on Mineral Creek with added storage that had been excavated out of solid rock. He created his own lake from which he cut ice in the winter and stored the blocks in his ice house for the summer months. His bottling plant was of the latest design. Mr. Fisher had put his roots down and lived in an impressive stone house adjoining the brewery.

Silverton was one of the first towns of its size in the United States to have a municipally owned water, light and sewer system. The water system consisted of a reservoir north of town that was supplied with sparkling clear mountain water by pipe line from an intake on Boulder Creek. The water works was privately owned until 1901, when it was purchased by the city. Silverton's coal-fired light system was privately owned until around 1903. That year the municipally owned electric utility system was installed and operated until 1907, when it was placed on standby status and cheaper electrical power was purchased from the Tacoma plant, owned by the Animas Power and Water Company, near Rockwood.

By 1899 Silverton was an impressive city with three churches, fourteen lodges and excellent schools. The mines in the county were producing an average of 115,000 tons of crude ore yearly and they employed some 1500 men during the eight summer and fall months and 1000 during the winter. Silverton had several fine clubs for the men and social organizations for the ladies. The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad even contributed to the activities by running excursion trains to Trimble Springs near Durango and other areas at reduced rates for special occasions. The Silverton Woman's Club was organized in 1897 and the San Juan Woman's Club in 1900. Another active ladies' club was the Band Mothers Club, organized to raise funds to purchase uniforms and instruments. St. John's Episcopal Church and the Christian Science Church were organized during 1898. The Silverton Club, a social club for men, with its reading room and library, was founded for the purpose of providing a desirable meeting place for the young men, away from the influence of saloons, gambling dens and prostitutes. A skating rink was flooded during 1885 and for several years skating was one of the social events of the winter months. Parties and racing events were held with afternoons set aside for the ladies. The Silver Cornet Band also played concerts at the rink on special occasions. The young ladies from Silverton were often invited to attend dances at Eureka or at one of the boarding houses perched alongside a mine, high on a mountainside, connected only by aerial tram to the valley floor far below. The ladies "rode the buckets" and had a wonderful, never-to-be-forgotten evening.

Blair Street, the first street east of Main (Greene), the scene of "ignoble influence", was open around the clock to satisfy the whims of the

transient miner "down off the hill" to see the town and relax a bit. At one time, a two-block long area was lined with nearly forty saloons, gambling houses and dance halls. The Red Light district was also located here and more than sixty girls worked in the parlor houses or walked the streets. Like other mining camps, Silverton had a rule — the "soiled doves" didn't venture uptown and the daughters and wives of the men of the town didn't venture to Blair Street. A few of Silverton's old Blair Street buildings remain today. The old Zanoni Padroni Saloon is now called the Bent Elbow Restaurant and the original bar can be seen in the dining room of the Grand Imperial Hotel. The Old Arcade Saloon is now the Old Arcade Souvenir Shop and the old Piedmont Saloon now houses Zhivago's Restaurant. For several years Silverton's lack of property taxes was offset by fines and license fees leveled at those businesses considered to be unsavory by many of its citizens. Each dance hall and saloon paid an annual city license fee of \$500 and the "girls of joy" were required by law to pay a \$5.00 "fine" each month to the city treasurer. Main Street had its saloons, too; the Parlour, Club, Office, Chicago, and others, yet none were as well known as Jack Slattery's Hub Saloon. Jack Slattery was a civil engineer who moved from Ironton to Silverton following the Silver Panic of '93. He purchased the Bucket of Blood Saloon and later, the Hub Saloon in the Grand Hotel. His interests were baseball, Silverton, betting, as well as mining; he was in several successful mining deals with Otto Mears. Jack sponsored Silverton's baseball team and one year he attempted to hire major league players. The fans travelled between the towns by horseback or carriage. Ourayites left at 5 A.M. and arrived in town by carriage around 10:00, allowing the men to make a few wagers prior to game time. Silverton's team had a keen, competitive spirit and became known as the "Peerless Players of the San Juans". One year Silverton ran a special train to Red Mountain to accommodate the fans. Slattery was very public minded and eventually became a State Senator. He was also second vice-president of the Silverton Railway and the Silverton Northern from 1917 to 1923. The Fashion Sporting Hall was rated as the finest club in town during the 1880's. All citizens, including Silverton's best, attended, knowing that it was a properly-run establishment. It had a splendid French cafe open twenty-four hours, serving fish, oysters on the half shell, all kinds of wild meat, the best brands of liquor and cigars. Music was also provided. The gambling and saloon room was well-run and posted signs advertised a \$500 reward to any guest "detecting any looseness on the part of a dealer". During the early 1900's Silverton's prosperity was reflected by its new appearance. Concrete soon replaced boardwalks, the Miners Union Hall was built in 1901 and the library, new city hall, county courthouse and the Miners Union Hospital were all completed by 1909. The years had begun to



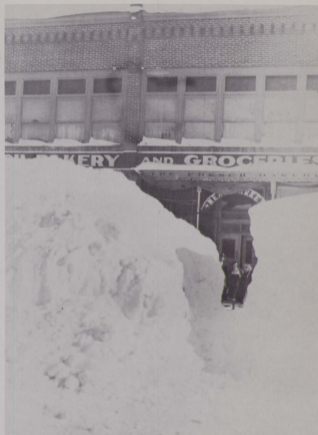
Corner of the sitting room in the bachelor domicile of Mrs. James E. Wood, Silverton, Colorado. "Roughing it in the Far West", Nov. 1886.

(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)



The Grand Hotel, now called Grand Imperial, about 1895. It was completed in 1883 and has contributed its share of history to the area. Each mining camp had one "great" hotel. From the start, three-fourths of the first floor was rented to various merchants at one time or another.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



"Last Heavy Frost". The photo was taken in front of the French Bakery, Silverton's leading bakery and grocery, probably in the 1930's. It was not uncommon for the residents, during a severe winter, to cut out steps in the snow leading down to the back or front door of their homes. Mine buildings and some houses were equipped with trap doors in the roof to make entry easier. Roofs often collapsed if not cleared of excess snow and inhabitants had to keep all chimneys free of snow drifts.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)

take their toll of the old timers; Col. Snowden, the original locator of Silverton, died at the age of 80 in 1907, and Ben Harwood, whose son was the first child born in Silverton, died at the age of 66 in 1908.

Silverton at the turn of the century, was the narrow gauge railroad capital of the United States, as the town was served by no less than four separate railway lines at one period of time. The Silverton branch of the Denver and Rio Grande was completed up the Grand Canyon of the Animas to Silverton in July 1882 and the line operates to this day. Otto Mears completed the Silverton Railroad, up Mineral Creek past Burro Bridge, Chattanooga, Summit, Red Mountain Town, to Ironton, a distance of 16.5 miles during October 1888. The line was extended 1.5 miles to Albany the following year. The Gold King mine stockholders incorporated the Silverton, Gladstone and Northerly in 1899 and the builders completed the nine mile line connecting the two towns the same year. Otto Mears, in later years, purchased this line. In 1893 Otto Mears and the Silverton Railroad extended a two mile line from the end of the Denver and Rio Grande tracks in Silverton, up the Animas River to the mouth of Arrastra Gulch to serve the mines and mills in that area. In 1895, following the Silver Panic that closed most of the mines in the Red Mountain area, Otto Mears incorporated the Silverton Northern and built a railroad line from the end of the Silverton Railroad line at Arrastra Gulch, 6.5 miles on up the Animas River, reaching Eureka in June 1896. The continued closure of mines in the Red Mountain area resulted in the Silverton Railroad going into receivership in 1898. In 1903 a new company, the Silverton Railway, was incorporated by Mears which took over the line. During 1904 the last of the "new" narrow gauge lines was laid when Otto Mears extended the tracks of the Silverton Northern from Eureka over the old toll road, for a distance of 4.0 miles, to the Gold Prince mill at Animas Forks. Thus it was possible for an early railroad buff, just after the turn of the century, to purchase tickets in Silverton and ride: the Silverton Railway to Red Mountain and its terminus, the Joker tunnel, which is located today just below and across the draw from the Idarado camp; the Silverton, Gladstone and Northerly to Gladstone and the Gold King mill; The Silverton Northern to Howardsville, Eureka and Animas Forks; and the Denver and Rio Grande to Rockwood and Durango. After years of little or no traffic, the Silverton Railway was finally abandoned in 1921 and the tracks removed in 1926. The Silverton, Gladstone and Northerly was acquired by the Silverton Northern in 1915. This line, which had not been used since 1924, was finally abandoned in 1937. In 1936 the Silverton Northern abandoned the line from Eureka to Animas Forks. There had been no trains over this section of track since the early 1920's. The remainder of the line from Silverton to Eureka was abandoned in 1942 after being dormant, except for an occasional train, for about ten years. "Casey Jones", the Sunnyside mine's gasoline



August 1899 photo of the Silverton Transfer Co., near the Grand Imperial. One of the original owners later sold out, moved to Denver, founded the Bowman Biscuit Company and retired a millionaire.

(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)



Silverton Fourth of July parade probably in the early 1920's. The old west flavor was still strongly retained.

(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)



The Tom Walsh "Martha Rose" smelter roasted ore on one side of Mineral Creek and the Silverton Brewery made beer on the other. About 1891.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



The participants in Silverton's parades appear to outnumber the spectators in this photo taken around 1909. Louis Wyman, a prosperous freighter, owned the building on the corner. To honor his trusty animals, he had a burro chiseled in relief on stone and set above his doorway.

(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)



Silverton's Main (Greene) Street about 1909. The Hub Saloon was operating in the Grand Hotel building as a stage coach was unloading passengers. With the exception of the horses and canvas awnings, the buildings haven't changed much the past 68 years.

(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)



"The Silverton-Ouray Stage" about 1909. The stage is loaded with ten people, a steamer trunk and one passenger's bouquet of flowers.

(Library, State Historical Society of Colorado)



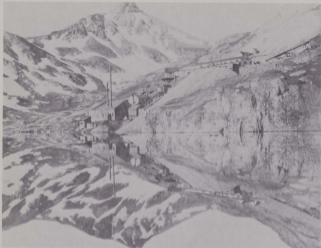
L. Wyman and Moffat freighting outfit in 1881, Silverton, Colorado. Miners often returned to the mines by hitching a ride on the ore wagons after a few days of fun and frolic in town.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



A three mile aerial tramway line connected the Sunnyside mine to the Eureka mill which was about 2000 feet below the ore loading terminal at the mine (elevation 12,300 feet). The tower in the foreground was 80 feet high and the buckets held about 1300 pounds of ore. Each bucket made the six-plus-mile round trip in about 75 minutes.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department. Photo by Lucas.)



Mirror image of Silver Lake and Iowa Tiger mine around 1900. The Silver Lake mine buildings are to the picture's right. The early miners are believed to have hidden high-grade ore along the lake shore. (Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



The Silver Lake mill just north of Silverton as it appeared at the turn of the century. The Silver Lake ore was low grade compared to that from other mines in the district, yet over \$7 million worth was shipped via the Silverton Northern from here.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)

powered railbus, made its last run in 1941. Passengers on Otto Mears' railroad lines rode in combination baggage-chairs or regular coaches. In 1906 Mears purchased for the Silverton Northern, his last remaining railroad, a Pullman-buffet car that he named *The Animas Forks*. A prospector, who only a few years earlier had hiked the road from Silverton to Animas Forks, was now able to ride first class over the very same trail and select his dinner from a widely-diversified bill-of-fare that included soups, fish, meats, vegetables and desserts. He could also request the wine list, if he desired, and choose any drink from eight liquors, two waters, and eleven wines stocked aboard the car.

In 1918 the newspapers were occupied with news of our soldiers at the front and the war effort here at home, until the outbreak of influenza that fall. On October 11, Silvertonites were a day late in receiving their mail from the south, as the mail was fumigated following the report of a possible Spanish Influenza outbreak in New Mexico. Silverton had no known cases at that time, but by the 18th of October two cases had been reported and the town board closed all public places, including churches, schools and lodges. Residents were warned to keep children at home, stay off the streets, and when it was required to purchase necessities, to keep the visit at a minimum. Within a week, by October 25, forty-two people had died. A portion of City Hall substituted as additional hospital space and three doctors were working around the clock to save the lives of those stricken. Young and old were hit and the nearby towns and mine camps sent their most seriously ill to Silverton to the doctors and for hospitalization. Some of the miners who died were unidentified at the time if they had just recently "hired on" at one of the mines and were not well known. By the first of November, 128 had died as the daily posted list of those who succumbed grew longer. By November 18, while influenza was raging in Durango, there had been only fourteen additional deaths in Silverton during the past week, no new cases the past 72 hours, and it appeared under control. Schools reopened on the 25th. On December 6, as an added precaution, a quarantine station was established. All persons coming to town had to remain at the station for 48 hours. Residents were required to remain at their homes during the same period. There were no additional cases and the quarantine was lifted. By the 13th of December a corrected death list was published indicating influenza had taken 146 lives. San Juan County and its mining camps had been severely hit and there were no families who hadn't lost a relative or a close friend.

Between 1895 and 1908 Silverton's mining community experienced continued prosperity as the value of mine production averaged \$2.5 million each year. It was also during this time that San Juan County reached its peak population of 5000. Production continued steadily, but at a slightly lower rate on through 1918, averaging \$1.8 million each



Jackson photo showing Sheridan Junction (Summit) and the famous "Ouray" Engine 100, about 1890. Passengers pose at this noted "stop" on the Rainbow Route atop Red Mountain Pass (adjacent to present Black Bear jeep trail). Sheridan Jct. Hotel can be seen at rear of train.
(*Denver Public Library, Western History Department*)



The Old Hundred mill, boarding house, shops and office with the Green Mountain mill in the background, as they appeared about 1910. The Green Mountain branch of the Silverton Northern served these mines and mills from Howardsville.
(*Denver Public Library, Western History Department*)



Casey Jones at Eureka, 1940. It originally had a Maxwell motor and was intended to serve as an ambulance. It soon appeared in other capacities, though, making the 20 minute run from Eureka to Silverton. Casey was eventually equipped with a Cadillac engine, could seat 11 passengers.
(*Denver Public Library, Western History Department*)

(*Denver Public Library, Western History Department*)



The tracks of the Silverton Northern, just north of the Silver Lake mill, were twisted when the flood of 1927 tore out the road bed. This same flood tore out the Silverton Northern bridge at the Silver Lake mill spur.

(*Library, State Historical Society of Colorado*)

year. One of the principal mines during those years was the Sunnyside, which closed in 1938. This great mine, presently being worked through the American tunnel by Standard Metals, is currently the largest gold producer in the state and employs some 200 men the year around. Otto Mears had pushed his rail line up Cunningham Gulch at the turn of the century to serve the Green Mountain, Buffalo Boy, Old Hundred, Pride of the West and Gary Owen mines. These, and the Kittimac near Middleton, the Gold Prince at Animas Forks, Gladstone's Gold King Consolidated, the Sultan North Star and the large Silver Lake and Iowa Tiger were the principal mines in the area. The Stoiber brothers had located the Silver Lake mine at an elevation of 12,200 feet and the camp with its boarding house was built on the lake shores. The Silver Lake tram was 13,730 feet long and in 1899 was one of the longest on the American continent. This tram connected the mine to the mill, powerhouse, and combination office and mansion, called "Waldheim", built in Animas Canyon. In 1901 Ed Stoiber and his wife, Lena, who controlled the property at that time, sold out to the Guggenheim interests for \$2.3 million. They moved to Denver and built a larger mansion called "Stoiberhof", which is standing today at 1022 Humbolt, in the Humbolt Island area, which has been designated a historic site. The mines operated until around 1914 and were leased in 1925 by the Shenandoah-Dives Mining Company, which controlled the Shenandoah-Dives, North Star, Mayflower and other properties. The Mayflower mill and tramway can be seen north of town today. The Mayflower mill eventually shut down in 1952, the same year the Rio Grande ceased year-round operations to Silverton. (Standard Metals later modernized the mill and operates it today.) The 1950's were severe years for Silvertonites, as mining was at a low ebb and the town had to adjust to the seasonal tourist industry. Several movies were made during that time which spurred the economy. The promotion of "Journey into Yesterday", the train trip from Durango to Silverton, brought in tourists during the summer months and helped save the city from bankruptcy. Silverton now looks more prosperous than it has for years and the upkeep on the buildings that had been neglected for so long a time, has been resumed. Silverton's future is tied to the mountains, the ores they contain, as well as the scenery they possess. . . . and the continued efforts of its people.



Running for the snowslide. Hard work is cut out for the Denver and Rio Grande Western to clear tracks below Silverton, Circa 1900's.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)



During the winter months it was necessary to use large crews of men to dig out the tracks from heavy snow falls and slides. The picture was taken at the Red Mountain depot looking north towards the Yankee Girl and Ironston during the 1890's.

(Denver Public Library, Western History Department)

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